

MEETING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND ADULT WITH SPECIAL NEEDS THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN NIGERIA SCHOOL SETTING: THE WAY FORWARD



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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the role of entrepreneurship education in skills acquisition for children and adult with special needs was discussed, with emphasis on the way forward towards the attainment of self-sustaining skills for such category of persons. The paper was necessitated by the fact that, entrepreneurship education for persons with special needs is indispensable in the face of the numerous barriers that prevent them from accumulating material assets through education, skills development, employment and income generation activities, in order to live a productive life. The concept of persons with special needs was discussed. The paper went further to discuss entrepreneurship education and how it affects children and adult with special needs. Potential barriers to the attainment of entrepreneurship education for persons with special needs were also highlighted and discussed. The paper enumerated certain steps that are necessary towards ensuring children and adult with special needs are accommodated in entrepreneurship programmes, to enable them acquire skills for self-reliance, and contribute to society.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education, persons with special needs.*

Introduction

Entrepreneurship Education at any level in school setting cannot be over emphasized. This is underscored by among other issues, the current high level special education graduate unemployment and the prevailing poverty in Nigeria. The need for entrepreneurship education in a school setting should be encouraged at all levels. The aim of entrepreneurship education is to equip children/adult with special needs in a school setting is to equip them with the theory and practice of entrepreneurship especially in respect of venture creation, since the unemployment rate of such people (i.e those who will like to work after school education are not available for employment is more worrisome) an urgent needs is to be done to address such problem with children and adult in a school setting. However, Entrepreneurship education should be address through curriculum restructures to accommodate such children and adult in a school setting.

The need for entrepreneurial education to be incorporated into special needs education curriculum for children and adult with special needs is a necessity. Such a need for entrepreneurship education for children and adult with special needs is indispensable in the face of the numerous barriers that prevent them from accumulating material assets through education, skills development, employment and income generation activities, in order to live a productive life. According to Nuanan (2010), educators and professionals working with children and adult with special needs,, need to shift their attention from the current curriculum and practice of special needs programmes-and services that only equip such persons with special needs with the skills to become job seekers, to an empowerment, goal oriented curriculum that will stimulate them to harness their abilities for job, creation after training.

However, the need to address poverty issues, particularly in developing countries, provides a compelling rationale for promoting the economic empowerment of children and adult with special needs. One of the reasons that so many persons with special needs are living in poverty is the difficulties that they face in earning a living, due not only to particular impairments that they may have, but also to a wide range of barriers that exist within society and effectively bar them from opportunities to participate as productive citizens. This is more so, as economic empowerment/entrepreneurship programmes of government at the different tiers have often excluded such persons with special needs. Thus, empowerment/entrepreneurship programmes such as the Subsidy Re-investment Programmes (SURE-P), National Directorate of Employment, (NDE), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), N-Power (job creation and empowerment programme), and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) etc, failed to accommodate children and adult with special needs in their framework for action (Anyaele, 2017).

The scale of this problem is illustrated by the estimate that 80% of children and adult with special needs living in developing countries are unemployed (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2003). Narayan and Petesch (2002) observe that poverty violates the fundamental human rights of with special needs, depriving them of the basic necessities of life including health, education, safe water, food, shelter and clothing including means of livelihood. Experiences indicate that the majority of persons with special needs are unemployed and often denied employment opportunities even when they have met necessary requirements. Consequently, they have no stable income and have to depend on the mercy of family members, well wishers and charity groups for handouts to sustain their livelihood (Tsengu, Brodtkorb and Almnes, 2006).

Moreover, when children and adult with special needs have access to training in skills which are relevant to the labour market, and suited to their abilities and interests, they can make a significant contribution in the workplace and to the living standards of their households, the community and wider society. This is increasingly recognized as opportunities have opened up in recent decades, both in training centers and in the open labour market. Yet in many developing countries including Nigeria, the potentials of many persons with special needs remain untapped, as they frequently do not have equal access to training in employable skills, relevant to the labour market in which they seek to work, either in formal employment, in self-employment or small businesses in the informal economy. According to Cobley (2011), enabling one person with special need to make a contribution to the production of goods and services not only increases the net economic benefit of that individual to society, but may also release family members from some of their caring responsibilities, thus enabling them to engage in productive activities themselves.

This paper therefore, discusses the role of entrepreneurship education in skill acquisition for children and adult with special needs in Nigeria. It reviewed the concepts of persons with special needs, entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship education for persons with special needs. The paper also highlighted potential barriers to entrepreneurship education as well as the way forward, towards providing entrepreneurship education for persons with special needs.

Concept of Persons with Special Needs

Special needs children include all children, who for whatever reasons, are failing to benefit from school (United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). Ozoji and Mugu cited in Unegbu (2006) define special needs persons as those with significant sensory deficits or unusual high intellectual capacities that are not properly addressed in the regular programme. In the same vein, Akuogibo and Dada cited in Nwachukwu (2006) defined the special needs child as one who:

Deviates from the ordinary child such that he/she requires special attention, special services and other areas that could make life more, meaningful and worth living... those who require special education service in order to benefit from the regular school curriculum. They are those whose learning difficulties or disabilities compel to require additional help in order to achieve their full educational potentials within the curriculum (p. 278).

In other words, special needs children are those children who cannot benefit maximally from the regular classroom teaching/learning experiences on account of physical, mental, emotional and other sundry disabilities, which may or may not be easily identified. Therefore, special needs children are special children who need to be given special attention in the classroom.

Moreover, persons with special educational needs according to Obani (2004) are exceptional persons who may be experiencing learning problems and difficulties as a result of difficulties or handicap or other forms of special needs. They however, require individually planned and systematically monitored arrangements of physical settings, special requirements and materials, special teaching procedures and other" interventions in order to achieve their greatest possible independence, self-sufficiency, academic success and self-fulfillment.

Education for persons with special educational needs Act 2004 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, defines special educational needs as a restriction in the capacity of a person to participate in, and benefit from education, on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability; or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without .that condition. Special educational needs as a term is related to terms like disability, impairment, handicap and special needs (Egunjobi, 2013). The unusual demands of these persons which compel teachers and relevant professionals to device» means of accommodation and modification in terms of lesson content, instructional methods, materials, learning environment, lesson presentation, etc, make them persons with special needs, because they cannot learn with maximum benefit without the use of specialized approaches, accommodations and modifications in schools and work environments.

Entrepreneureship Education

The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) as cited in Oviawe (2010) defined entrepreneurship as the art which involves recognizing a business opportunity, mobilizing resources and persisting to exploit that opportunity. Entrepreneurship, according to Omolayo (2006) is the act of starting a company, arranging business deals and taking risks in order to make a profit through the education skills acquired. He stresses further, that it is the process of bringing together creative and innovative ideas and coupling these with management and organizational skills in order to combine people, money and resources, to meet an identified need and create wealth. The

entrepreneur has been seen as an actor, innovator or a developer of technology (Oviawe, 2010).

The entrepreneurship education refers to many things to various people as applicable to their values and observations of what it means to them. However, a vast majority of the definitions, as proffered by different writers find common ground in the claim that, entrepreneurship education is ultimately geared towards inculcating job creation skills in learners. Entrepreneurship education is the type of education which has the ability to impact on the growth and development of an enterprise through technical and vocational training. It entails the philosophy of self-reliance such as creating a new cultural and productive environment, promoting new sets of attitudes and culture for the attainment of future challenges (Ogundele, Akingbade and Akinlabi [as cited in Omede&Oguche, 2016]). It is a potent and viable tool for self-empowerment, job and wealthcreation. It entails teaching students, learners and would-be business men, equipping the trainees with skills needed for teaching responsibility and developing initiatives of prospective trainees (Ezeani, 2012).

Moreover, entrepreneurship education could be seen as a skill-oriented education, education for self-reliance, training for managing reasonable risk in business world, and training for economic and social integration (Opaim, Olayi and Ewa 2009). Omede and Oguche (2016), refer entrepreneurship education as the training that one engages in, for self employment, self esteem and independent living. Through entrepreneurship education, persons with special needs can in one way or the other contribute to national development. Entrepreneurship education embraced skill building programmes in creative thinking, product development and marketing, negotiation, leadership training and wealth generation. Accordingly, it contributes in immeasurable ways toward creating new jobs, wealth creation, poverty reduction, and income generating for both government and individuals.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) as cited in Omede and Oguche (2016) highlighted the following objectives of entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities:

- ❖ Prepare them for useful living in the society;
- ❖ To provide them with saleable entrepreneurship skills relevant in the 21st century and beyond;
- ❖ To enable them compete with their peers in developed world, technology development and Application;
- ❖ To make them partners in small scale industries;
- ❖ To make them contribute to Nigerian information communication technological needs; and
- ❖ To provide them with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in varied settings.

Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition

Children and adults with special needs in school setting can successfully worked in a variety of gainful occupation after graduation. They can be entrepreneurs, self-employed workers, farmers, factory workers, teachers, shop assistants, bus drivers, artist, computer technician the list is endless.

However, adults with special need in higher institutions of learning according to national university commission (N.U.C) 2004 has come up with a draft curricular in entrepreneurship as part of general studies. This consists of both foundation and practical courses.

Aspect of National University Commission

Entrepreneur studies in a school setting, the draft curriculum includes soap /detergent, tooth brush and paste making, photography, bricks, nails, screw making, cloth dyeing/textile, block making, robe making, plumbing, vulcanizing , brewing, glassware production, ceramic production, paper production, water treatment/packaging, food processing/ packaging/ preservation, metal work/fabrication, vegetables oil and soft extraction, fisheries/agriculture, refrigeration/ air conditioning, plastic making , crop production, electrical wiring, radio/TV repairs, carving, weaving, brick laying making, baking, iron welding, carpentry, interior decoration, printing, animal husbandry, poultry, piggery, goat, metal craft-blacksmith etc. sanitary wares, vehicle maintenance, book keeping etc.

Looking at the above entrepreneur skills, there is need for all teachers regardless of their (teaching) subjects to teach in such a way that can promote these entrepreneurship skills in children and adults with special needs in a school setting.

Barriers to Entrepreneurship for Persons with Special Needs

Children and adult with special needs like those without special needs, face general barriers to labourmarket participation as well as specific barriers to entrepreneurship in particular. According to Lechner and Vazquez-Alvarez (2011), international studies have found disability consistently to have a negative effect on labour market outcomes, including employment rates, earnings and unemployment rates. Variations in impairment characteristics of type, severity and number of health problems or impairments, influence participation rates, types of occupation and earnings (Meager and Higgins 2011).

Children and adult with special needs are likely to face specific barriers to entering and sustaining entrepreneurship in addition to the general barriers, each of which requires a specific policy response. However, some of these barriers, arguably, are very deep-rooted social-structural constraints imposing severe limits on life chances for certain groups of persons with special needs.

According to Ayodele (2006), the major barriers to entrepreneurship for persons with special needs include:

- ❖ **Access to Start-Up Capital:** persons with special needs often experience difficulties financing new start-ups due to limited personal financial resources (savings, home ownership), which, in turn, are partly due to poor education, lower employment rates and the concentration of disabled employees in low-paid occupations; poor credit rating after long-term benefit receipt; disinterest/discrimination on the part of banks; lack of accessible information on sources of grants and loans.
- ❖ **Benefits Trap:** aspiring entrepreneurs with special needs often fear losing the security of regular benefit income. Limited awareness of eligibility for benefits, combined with expectations that income from entrepreneurship might be initially low, contributes to perceptions of self-employment as 'risky' and may deter business start-up.
- ❖ **Lack of Relevant Business Knowledge and Skills:** children and adult with special needs often lack specialist business management, legal and financial expertise due to limited relevant education and employment experience. Again, lack of managerial expertise might reflect the concentration of disabled employees at the lower end of organizational job hierarchies.
- ❖ **Lack of Confidence/Limited Aspirations:** this refers to individual beliefs related to identifying a business opportunity as a potential source of sustainable income, to be able to develop the business to achieve this goal or the stigma associated with business failure. Aspiring entrepreneurs with special needs often lack the self-belief that they can start and operate businesses successfully, particularly among those with mental health issues. Both informal (family and friends) and formal sources of business support providers might act in ways that undermine would-be entrepreneurs' self-confidence and discourage start-up (Foster 2010).
- ❖ **Consumer Discrimination:** consumer discrimination deters self-employment by reducing the demand for goods and services produced by special needs business owners and reduce the rewards to entrepreneurship.
- ❖ **Absence of Appropriate Business Support/Unhelpful Attitudes of Business Advisers:** this has a number of dimensions. First, advisers are often reluctant to recommend self-employment as a career option for special needs persons and sometimes actively attempt to dissuade them. Such views might be a consequence of advisers' inadequate or stereotypical understandings of the activity restrictions, arising from specific conditions and/or misperceptions of recipients' capabilities as well as a genuine regard for the risks persons with special needs face in starting and running businesses. Those with mental health issues might be particularly susceptible to unsupportive adviser perceptions.

Second, and crucially, training is not always tailored to individual needs and therefore of limited value to particular recipients. For some clients, support might need to be provided over an extended period of time to deal with recurring conditions or particular stresses. There is a perception among some support recipients that funders face pressures to move quickly onto the next case rather than provide longer-term support to those assisted.

Third, the visibility of support services provided or a lack of information made available in particular formats (Braille etc). Individuals with good business ideas are unsure who might be able to provide advice to develop ideas and exploit them commercially. Fourth, lack of accessible premises or transport/funding for transport to, or, arid from advice centre. Individuals simply are unable to travel to meet advisers. Such arguments might have less purchase today where governments provide information online, although partially sighted recipients might require thought to be given to ensure websites are user-friendly.

Fifth, use of appropriate language. Using terms like 'enterprise' or 'entrepreneur' may be off-putting to those perceiving self-employment simply as a means of working and earning a living for oneself. Sixth, the diversity of impairment/disability means that some special needs entrepreneurs might not perceive themselves as 'disabled' and prefer to be supported under mainstream, rather than disability-specific, services.

Other, potential barriers to the implementation of entrepreneurship education for children and adult with special needs as outlined by Nuanan (2008) include:

- ❖ Insufficient qualified trainers to develop and introduce the desired courses in special institutions of learning.
- ❖ Weak linkage between education institutions, successful entrepreneurs and support agencies involved in the promotion and development of entrepreneurship.
- ❖ Lack of strong governmental policies on entrepreneurship education.
- ❖ Inadequate facilities for practical acquisition of entrepreneurship skill.
- ❖ Inadequate implementation of policies regarding entrepreneurial training for self-reliance and independence of persons with special needs
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The Way Forward in Providing Entrepreneurship Education for Persons with Special Needs

The way forward towards providing entrepreneurship education for skills development is based on the fact that children and adult with disabilities are capable of accomplishing most of the tasks involved in enterprise development. Nevertheless, certain activities may need to be adapted and strategies developed to compensate for the disability. Moreover, two persons with the same disability do not necessarily have the same capabilities and, consequently, it becomes necessary to understand their

abilities while developing the strategy. Every person is different and therefore should be allowed to test his or her capabilities and limitations.

Trainees must be allowed to develop their own personal way of accomplishing the tasks required in the enterprise. According to Maritz and Laferriere (2016), trainers must be able to give advice, support and direction

- ❖ **Increased Awareness:** An initial and extremely important step for children and adult with special needs is to increase awareness of entrepreneurial activity. Promotion and education around the viability, opportunities, and risks of entrepreneurship is a first step to increasing entrepreneurial engagement.
- ❖ **Entrepreneurial Skills Training:** Expansion of existing small business start-up training programmes is another policy recommendation that can lead to more interest, attempts, and success in small business start-ups. Expanding access to existing programmes and bringing in new technologies to deliver training that supports children and adult with special needs and accommodates lower education levels is key. Programmes can also be tailored to specific audiences with specific needs. Business training and support services that are not currently accessible to those with special needs can be expanded and adapted to be inclusive of those with special needs.
- ❖ **Advisory Skill Training:** Beyond increasing the available entrepreneurial training for children and adult with special needs is increasing the capacity of those involved in training. The provision of training to support workers and business mentors to understand the dynamics of special needs, so that training can be adjusted to fit better with client needs, is an important policy recommendation. For those who are unaccustomed to working with persons with special needs, this may require sensitivity training and the ability to help identify and determine how to exploit business opportunities that may be viable to increase self-employment.
- ❖ **Technology Access and Assistive Technology Acquisition:** There is need for increase support and access to technologies for assistance of those with special needs. This access needs to be provided with respect to accessing the internet and integrating technology platforms to work with various assistive technologies. Provision of electronic services and web-based content that includes materials useful for training and required for legal business requirements must be incorporated to reduce societal impediments for potential entrepreneurs with special needs. This can be extended into financial support for the acquisition of assistive technology that would allow individuals with special needs to see their self-employment opportunity come to fruition. This can be extended by provision of existing technologies and can involve support for research and development of new products and services for such persons with special needs.

- ❖ **Access to Financial Support:** Arguably the largest hurdle for any start-up is accessing capital. This constraint is even more pronounced among persons with special needs. children and adult with special needs have less work experience, education, and savings; together these create an obvious barrier for the individual to access capital and financial support. Additionally, these barriers increase the stigma of such persons with special needs as a bad investment option for those with available financial resources. Several policy options exist including accessibility of information to make special needs entrepreneur business ready, increased participation in venture capital events, and business networking to reduce uncertainty within the larger group of financial stakeholders, or the creation of specific funds to support special needs' entrepreneurial endeavours at the microenterprise and small business levels. Reducing the barriers to accessing capital and information on how to find capital is therefore key to increased entrepreneurial engagement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From analysis of issues in entrepreneurship for persons with special needs, it is evident that such categories of persons have been largely left out of entrepreneurship programmes aimed at empowering persons to acquire skills for self-reliant, self development and contribute to the growth of society. However, the need for entrepreneurship for these category of persons cannot be over emphasized, this is because it gives ample opportunity them to train and acquire skills for self development which in turn promotes the nation's economy. Thus, for persons with special needs to acquire entrepreneurship skill, the following recommendations should be put to use by relevant stakeholders:

- ❖ Teachers of children and adult with special needs should shift from curriculum that only equips themwith skills to become job seekers to a productive goals-oriented curriculum.
- ❖ Entrepreneurship should be integrated into special needs education curriculum
- ❖ Economic empowerment/entrepreneurship programmes of government such as SURE-Pand N-Power should make provision for persons with special needs.
- ❖ Entrepreneurship/skills development programmes of national directorate of employment (NDE) the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and the Small and Medium Scale Enterprise Development Agency, should make provisions in their programmes to accommodate persons with special needs.

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